

The Margaret Eaton School of Literature and Expression
Toronto

Prologue to Victor Hugo.

The satire you have seen, whate'er its skill,
Appeals to lower instincts; let us now
By way of contrast, contemplate a side
Of human nature that inspires our faith,
Fills us with hope, and teaches charity,
Virtue divine which links our soul with God.

When Victor Hugo wrote "Les Misérables",
That most pathetic book, where as we read,
We think with Lincoln, "Surely God must love
The common people, since he made so many",
A careless English critic, skimming o'er
Its pages, hit upon a stumbling-block,
A fault he deemed it, in the author's plan.
"For why", he cried, "should Victor Hugo take
Almost a hundred pages to describe
That excellent old bishop who performs
Just one good deed within a page or two,
And ne'er appears again?" The answer's plain,
You'll sense it as you see upon the stage
Our own Canadian ~~Barton~~ ^{DeLor} play the part.
That noble act of sacrificial love
Creates within the heart of Jean Valjean
So great an inspiration that the convict
Becomes himself a saintly character,
And as his strength was, so we find his love;
For he who robbed the poor Savoyard boy
Is father to Cosette and Marius,
Taught by that one kind deed to comprehend
"The still sad music of humanity".
Nay more, his gracious nature so affects
The iron heart of Javert, that in conflict
Between the calls of duty and of mercy,
He takes his own life sooner than mar Valjean's,
And, as he does it, wins Christ's love and ours.

So, by the gift of silver candlesticks,
The pious priest has given the world a saint,
And heaven a soul made fit to dwell with God.

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FRANCO-BRITISH PROLOGUE

Spoken by Emma Scott Nasmith, May 10th, 1918.

To-night from out the gloom of former days
A Grecian muse appears to meet your gaze,
And for the Franco-British Aid extends
A welcome warm to past and present friends.

'Twas Sparta first at famed Thermopylae
Made Europe safe for young democracy,
And Athens who first taught these arts of peace,
For which we all applaud the name of Greece.
So Belgium at Liege first led the dance,
And gave French time to bring some help to France.

Three authors in three different ages born,
The literature of France in turn adorn,
The first in comic art all men surpassed,
The next in lyrics, and in prose the last.
Of each to-night a masterpiece you'll see,
Proving the proverb, "All good things are three".

No character appeals to comic art
As the mean man who "never has a heart".
The miser, whom the Roman Plautus drew,
In Shakespeare's Shylock finds a reading new,
And if you need another proof to "cinch it",
Read in last Harper's "Drawer" of Mr. Pinchett.

But all the misers literature has known
Give precedence to him who here is shown -
Molière's *Avare*, well nicknamed Harpagon,
Which means in Greek "the raker-in of pelf"
Who keeps the muck he rakes-in for himself.
A type we all have seen in Bunyan's book,
And watched them writhing on Miss Tarbell's hook.

Now when our scene's unfolded to your eyes,
Its modernness should fill you with surprise.
One almost feels that Molière wrote as though
He gazed, a prophet, on our passing show.
For in Valère we see our food controller,
Who soon will leave us no use for a molar.
He cuts off all that's toothsome - wheat, meat, sweet,
And says we eat to live, not live to eat;
Advice the miser would inscribe in gold

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Above his chimney-piece, when he is told,
By his intendant, who knows how to flatter,
As well as how to skimp his master's platter.

Not so the coachman-cook, dull Master Jack,
Who tells the curious miser such a pack
Of truths unpleasant, that with furious rage
He beats the cook, then, maddened, leaves the stage.
Dull Jack suspects Valère to be a coward,
Altho' he's brave as Sidney or as Howard,
Yet lets the bullying coachman drive him hard,
Till at the wall he turns and cudgels Jack,
Who, beaten black for telling what is true,
For acting what is false is beaten blue.
A paradox oft found on satire's page,
And not less true to nature on the stage.



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